# CULTURAL GUIDE
# TO INDONESIA

Prepared for the

OVERSEAS BRIEFING CENTER
FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

1993

revised by Heidi Whitesell, 2004

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# PREFACE

This guide offers insight into the Indonesian culture in general; we will not attempt a cultural profile of all the peoples of Indonesia. One may encounter a variety of behavior not only if one travels widely but even in Jakarta where all these cultures are represented. Described here, however, is a national norm for typical social contracts that has evolved since independence. There are predictable routines, especially at the official level, which vary little despite the remoteness of the area. It is, in fact, a mark of the successful socialization of these diverse peoples that such a superficial cultural uniformity will appear to exist in all parts of the archipelago.

The close observer will note, however, that no matter how remote the location, the local government official is more than likely to be a Javanese "en poste." The acculturation of the archipelago from Jakarta has been very pervasive, and the government in Jakarta is run by the Javanese. A practical understanding of Indonesian culture therefore requires a close study of Javanese culture. Some of its basic values will be discussed at the end of this guide. The customs described in the following pages are based on Javanese norms, and the reader should be sensitive to these norms even if exceptions are sometimes encountered.

# INTRODUCTION

With 17,670 islands, Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago, stretching from Southeast Asia to Australia in a 3,500-mile crescent. This strategic geographical position greatly influences the country’s cultural, social, political, and economic patterns.

The fourth most populous country in the world, it is also one of the most culturally diverse, encompassing Javanese Muslims, Portuguese-speaking Christians, Balinese Hindus, and animist tribespeople from Borneo and New Guinea. Three hundred different ethnic groups inhabit the islands and while the official language, Bahasa Indonesia, is prevalent almost everywhere, 250 other distinct languages are also spoken.

# HISTORY

The earliest inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago are believed to have originated in India or Burma. In 1890 fossils of Java Man (*homo erectus*), some 500,000 years old, were found in east Java. Under influence of Buddhism, several kingdoms formed on the islands of Sumatra and Java from the 7th to 14th century. The arrival of Arab traders later brought Islam, which became the dominant religion.
When the Europeans came in the early 16th century, they found a multitude of small states. These were vulnerable to the Europeans, who were in pursuit of dominating the spice trade. In the 17th century the Dutch emerged as the most powerful of the Europeans, ousting the British and Portuguese (except for Timor).

After the Dutch East India Company was liquidated, its possessions in Indonesia were taken over by the Dutch government. After Japanese occupation ended in 1945, the Indonesians declared independence, led by Achmed Soekarno. The Dutch finally accepted in 1949, and Soekarno became the country's first president. After Soekarno's autocratic rule was almost overthrown, army leader General Soeharto became president in 1968. Soeharto enriched himself, but the nation grew poorer, and he was forced to step down after massive demonstrations in 1998; Vice President, B.J. Habibie, was subsequently installed. Habibie's successor, Abdurrahman Wahid, was the first democratically elected president, but did not serve long. In July 2001 Megawati Sukarnoputri became Indonesia's latest president.

The country currently suffers from internal religious struggles, including rising Islamic extremism, and several regions striving for independence (Aceh, Papua).

# POLITICS

According to the 1945 Constitution there are six organs of the Indonesian state:
the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusya-waratan Rakyat or MPR), which holds the supreme power in the state;
the President, who serves as both head of state and chief executive for a term of five years and is eligible for re-election;
the House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat), with a total of 500 representatives, 462 members from the political organizations that participated in the elections and 38 members from the Armed Forces;
the Supreme Advisory Council (Dewan Pertimbangan Agung), the function of which is to answer any questions the President may ask in relation to the affairs of the State; members of the council are nominated by the President and serve for five years;
the State Audit Board (Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan), which is the judicial arm of the State and exists beside the legislative and executive branches;
and the Supreme Court (Mahkamah Agung), the main function of which is to conduct official examinations of government financial accounts.

The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia is usually referred to as the 1945 Constitution, representing the year the Republic was established, and also to distinguish it from other constitutions introduced in a liberated Indonesia. The 1945 Constitution was built upon the Indonesian concepts of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), *musyawarah* (deliberations of representatives), and *mufakat* (consensus).

The president serves as both chief of state and head of government. President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Vice President Hamzah Haz were elected separately in July 2001 by the People's Consultative Assembly, or MPR, for five-year terms; the next election is to be held in July 2004.

President Megawati announced her cabinet in August 2001 and named them Gotong Royong Cabinet (Mutual Cooperation Cabinet), comprising three coordinating ministers, 18 ministers with portfolios, nine state ministers, and two high officials with status as state ministers.

## ECONOMICS

Indonesia's economic outlook is somewhat bleak: In 2002 Indonesia's economy grew around 3.5% with an inflation rate of 11.9%. Unemployment ran about 10.6%. Approximately one-third of the population lives below the poverty line (1999).

Indonesia's severe economic development problems stem from secessionist movements and the low level of security in the regions. Also contributing to economic difficulties are the lack of reliable legal recourse in contract disputes, corruption, weaknesses in the banking system, and strained relations with the IMF. Investor confidence will remain low and few new jobs will be created under these circumstances.

The Indonesian economy is comprised of an agriculture sector (17%), industry (41%), and services (42%). The country's industries include petroleum, natural gas, textiles, apparel, and footwear; mining, cement, chemical fertilizers, plywood; rubber; food; and tourism.

## POPULATION

Indonesia's inhabitants, though of one ancestry, have developed separate cultures due to their separation by seas. The population of Indonesia, therefore, is classified into four ethnic groups not so much on the basis of racial origin but rather on linguistic identity. The four groups are the Melanesians (a mixture of the Sub-Mongoloids and the Wajaks), the Proto-Austronesians (including the Wajaks), the Polynesians, and the Micronesians.

There are about 500 ethnic groups in Indonesia from Sabang (at the northernmost tip of Sumatra) to Merauke in Papua. The Javanese community makes up the largest number of Indonesia's total population, followed by the Sundanese, Madurese, Minang-kabau, Buginese, Batak, and the Balinese. Other ethnic groups include the Ambonese, Dayaks, Sasaks, the Acehnese, and more. Apart from these indigenous communities, other sub-communities of foreign descent are the Chinese, Arabs, and Indians.

Indonesia's total population as of 2000 is 203.5 million, with a growth rate of 1.35% during 1990 to 2000. This shows a decline of .68% since 1980, due to the success of the national family planning program. Fifty-nine percent of Indonesia's population populates the island of Java, an area comprising 7% of the whole country. Maluku and Papua, which comprise 25% of Indonesia, have a population of only 2% of the total.

# CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Indonesia is a country of incredible cultural diversity, an anthropologist's heaven where some of the world's last glimpses can be had of still-functioning pre-literate societies. At the other extreme is the highly sophisticated and extraordinarily resilient central Javanese culture, which has assimilated successive waves of Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Islamic, European colonial, and Western nationalist influences over an indigenous culture thousands of years old based on animism, ancestor worship, and mysticism.

Between these extremes there are many distinct ethnic groups, each with its own cultural personality and language. On Sumatra alone there are at least six distinct cultures. Among them the Acehnese in the extreme north are very strong in a conservative Islamic tradition; the Bataks to the immediate south are Christian or Muslim, and by traditional character sharply rational and egalitarian. In central Sumatra the Minangkabau are a matrilineal society with therefore an unusually prominent role for women. The people of Palembang on the southeast coast are noted for their commercial prowess and aggressiveness in business, the heritage perhaps of the great trading empire of the Sriwidjaya centered there.

# SOCIAL CUSTOMS

## Appropriate Greeting Forms

Greeting is very important in Indonesian society and an appropriate greeting is more than a pleasantry. It is a guarantee of civility and a show of respect. While the form is informal the observance is a formality that should not be omitted.

Salutations do not vary between men, women, superiors, inferiors, or equals. You greet your servants, cabinet ministers, or passersby on your neighborhood walk with the egalitarian salutation of Islam: selamat (safe, blessed). It should be combined with another word or words to suit the occasion:

Selamat pagi (morning) = Good morning
Selamat siang (midday) = Good day
Selamat sore (afternoon from 3 p.m. until dark) = Good afternoon
Selamat malam (night) = Good evening or Goodnight
Selamat datang (come) = Welcome
Selamat jalan (go, walk) = Have a safe journey
Selamat ulang tahun = Happy Birthday
Selamat Hari Natal = Merry Christmas
Selamat Hari Raya Idul Fitri = The greeting on Islam's principal Holy Day

More combinations are possible but this will indicate the pervasiveness of the verbal greeting and the very least amount of Indonesian language a foreigner should learn.

There are traditional gestures of greeting, which the foreigner will observe and may wish to imitate when it feels natural to do so. Indonesians expect foreigners to shake hands, however, and, in fact, this is the common practice among Indonesians except at traditional ceremonies. It is customary for them to shake hands all around the room when they arrive and again before departing. A variation of the handshake especially among women or toward a particularly respected or elderly person is to clasp the other person's hand with both your hands and to lower your head somewhat.

The social kiss is very much in vogue in Jakarta and was, in fact, the subject of comment in the press (who does it and who doesn't?). It is not really a kiss but a touch of cheeks (first the right and then the left) as one shakes hands. This is very common among foreigners and among women. The Javanese kiss is the touch of cheeks accompanied by a soft but audible inhalation through the nostrils and need not be accompanied by a handshake. This is very common among Indonesian women, and it is not unusual for a foreign woman to be greeted thus by an Indonesian woman as a sign of affection.

## Appropriate Titles

The family is the most important unit in Indonesian life, and the family dynamic is based on social interaction, particularly on the view of a leader as father. Thus, in terms of genetic success as well as deference to rank it is polite to address a man of reasonable age or status as "bapak" (father) and a woman of similar stature as "ibu" (mother). "Bapak" can be shortened to "Pak" and combined with the first name or a short version of the full name for a very proper but affectionate reference to a person of very high rank. Thus, President Megawati is "Ibu Mega." The foreigner would be cautious, however, in adopting the familiar appellation in reference to persons of high rank, and would probably stick with the English title. When to switch to the familiar is a matter of instinct. It is proper to call any other adult (even if they are not married or don't have children) "Pak" or "Ibu" with or without the personal name.

## Language, Gestures, and Facial Expressions

It is extremely useful and socially rewarding to learn the Indonesian language. Indonesians are deeply impressed that you have made an effort to know them through language, and they are very tolerant of your mistakes. In addition, it is almost necessary for the person managing servants, shopping, or traveling in the countryside. A working knowledge greatly reduces the frustration and helplessness one will inevitably feel from time to time, especially in the beginning.

Happily, the language is relatively easy to learn at a functional level. Pronunciation and spelling have been standardized: syntax is at a minimum and nearly the same words and phrases apply to all ages and stations (unlike Javanese, which has several levels). Perhaps this is the simplicity of a lingua franca that developed as a means of communication among seamen in Malay ports.

As one advances, however, one realizes it can be a complicated and subtle language. There is a conscious effort to "upgrade" Indonesian by adding affixes, lengthening words, and constructing

new ones. At the same time, there is an irrepressible urge in the witty and practical Indonesian mind to coin idioms, slang, abbreviations and acronyms: For example, "kenop 15" is short for keputusan nopember 15, the 15 November 1978 announcement of the rupiah's devaluation; so "kenop 15" is a rather catchy way of referring to the devaluation of 1978. Another example: "Super Semar" is short for "surat perintah sebelas maret" (Decree of March 11). It refers to the event of 11 March 1966 when the ailing Sukarno finally turned over all the powers of government to the then General Suharto—a momentous occasion and milestone in the transition of power. The relatively irreverent reference is further beguiling when one knows that "Semar" is a character in classical Javanese drama, a quasi-humorous figure but one of great power and respect, lending a symbolic authority to the decree.

The result of all this is complex and demanding, but rewarding. Jokes, puns, and euphemisms are the likely forms of political comment when outright criticism would not be tolerated.

No matter what the language, however, the manner of communication is most important. In many ways, the Javanese, and thus the Indonesian, place great value on outward forms of courtesy, politeness, respect, a smiling face, genial demeanor, pleasant voice, non-threatening words, restrained postures, and gestures that demonstrate self-control—in fact, everything that assures the onlooker that the universe is in order and that peace and harmony prevail. Self-control is especially valued, and a threatening gesture, loud or argumentative language, or a display of anger will immediately identify the perpetrator as a boor. The catharsis of letting off steam, so valued in the American scheme of candor and frankness, has no place. Indonesians are particularly sensitive to a show of aggressiveness or arrogance, or what they perceive as such, even though to the American no such impression is intended. Standing arms akimbo, a slightly disdainful expression, a peremptory summons means almost nothing in the American context but will be instantly noted and resented by the Indonesian.

Indonesia is a "touching" society. Java is so crowded it can hardly be avoided. People are used to being close and need very little private space. In conversation some body contact is, therefore, common but it should not be a patronizing or intimate gesture. An Indonesian would punctuate a conversation by a touch on the arm, a confiding gesture without being demonstrative. The more robust bear hug or a clap on the back or shoulder should be avoided.

It is considered very rude to point directly at someone, with a finger or, even worse, the toe. The perfectly proper western-seated posture with the legs crossed at the knee is to be avoided therefore in formal situations as one is very likely inadvertently to point a toe at someone. In casual social affairs or business meetings, however, crossing legs in the Western fashion is common.

The left hand is considered unclean as it is used to wash after bodily functions and, therefore, it is never used to eat nor to pass or receive an object.

## Gifts and Bonuses

Gift giving is a very important and critical element in many of the traditional societies in Indonesia, and the modern practice of frequent gifts and an apparent fascination with receiving presents actually reflects a deeper cultural value. In traditional cultures the exchange of gifts marks every important life ceremony and the value of the gift reflects the status of the donor. Gifts of textiles have important symbolic associations with female fertility and the whole subject reflects the status of the donor. Let these remarks serve as background to the following comments on the occasions when gifts are given. These occasions are probably obligatory to an Indonesian but the American has more flexibility in deciding how deeply to get involved.

Kenang-Kenangan, a souvenir. The foreigner may receive a gift when making a first call on an official, especially on a trip out of Jakarta. This is more likely for senior and military personnel. Men will usually receive a plaque and women a textile or some other local craft. In current practice these are not ostentatious but do serve as a material reminder of the occasion and of the proper hospitality of the host. It is optional to give a gift in return, but the host is obviously pleased if one is presented. It is wise to have a book, stationery, scarf, candy, or preserved food on hand.

Oleh-Oley. Indonesians are expected to bring souvenirs from a trip to their family, close friends, and servants. Though each gift need not be costly, it can be a significant expense of a trip if the custom is conscientiously observed. Americans may find themselves in a justifiable quandary if they weigh the expense involved against the undoubted delight and appreciation their gift receives. They may opt out of this custom and, be assured, Indonesians do not expect foreigners to be as conscious of gift- giving as they are themselves.

Lebaran. The end of the Muslim fasting month culminates in Idul Fitri, the year's most important holiday, called Lebaran in Indonesia. The Lebaran season is a time of feasting and wearing new clothes. It is appropriate to send food to the home of one's official contacts, neighbors and friends. This is optional and should depend on your relationship with the persons in question. In any case, it need not be elaborate; in fact, government policy is officially to discourage gift giving and some officials will not accept them. However, to one's employees it is obligatory to pay one month's salary as bonus and considered highly important if not obligatory to present new clothing as well.

## Weddings, Birthdays, Anniversaries, and Other Auspicious Occasions

It is optional to bring a gift if you are invited to a function to observe these occasions. Your presence will be considered an honor, and a gift is a matter of individual judgment depending on your relationship to the person in question. The gift may be decorative or utilitarian. It is difficult to know if these are appreciated or even noted, since one seldom receives any acknowledgment. However, this writer has experienced the amazement of being reminded some ten years after an event of gifts that had been given at long-forgotten (by the donor) wedding receptions. Flowers may be sent on these occasions as well or as a thank you for a kindness or hospitality.

# SOCIAL OCCASIONS

## Social or Business Call

Despite an increasing use of restaurants or public halls for entertaining, there is still ample opportunity for being entertained at an Indonesian home, if not for a meal at least for a social call. Whatever the occasion there is a distinct sense of pride in the home and recognition of the requirement of hospitality that ensures the guest will be received with grace and courtesy even in the humblest village dwelling.

The social or business call at home or office follows an invariable routine. Your host will meet you at the door, greet you warmly, usher you in, and instruct you where to sit. Polite conversation will follow and eventually food will be placed at a table before you by a servant or staff member. There will be a drink (tea, coffee or soft drink) and a snack. Host and guest will ignore the food while the conversation proceeds (conceivably on the subject that is the purpose of the call). At some point the guest will be invited to eat. This is the signal to taste the food with evident appreciation but not undue haste and also to note that the call is drawing to a close. Soon after the refreshment is taken (but not necessarily finished) the guest should rise to take leave. The host will follow you to your car and will wait until the car pulls away. The final gesture is the mutual wave of goodbye. The proper American host will follow the same routine. An Indonesian guest will not touch any food until invited to eat. The guest should be escorted to the car, and this applies to the ranking guests even at a large reception.

There is some variation to this tea ceremony, and you may encounter more casual behavior among westernized, non-Javanese, and young people. It is important to know that this is the polite formula, however, and to observe it in appropriate situations.

## Lebaran

The Lebaran season is a good time to call at Indonesian homes. For the Indonesian it is an obligatory time to call on family elders and superiors to offer the phrase "ma'af lahir bathin" (please forgive me for my failings, outward or within.) Elders of families or senior officials will have specified hours of open house during the first two days to receive callers. A buffet table will be laid and the guests are expected to eat something, as this is an integral part of the call.

Calls on friends, colleagues, and neighbors can be made by prearrangement during Lebaran week or at other times during the year. If a drop-in call is made, probably the safest time is near 6:00 p.m. when evening prayers and bath are completed. Newcomers should call on the chairman of the neighborhood organization "Rukun Tetangga" (neighbors in harmony) or R.T.

## Selamatan

The selamatan is probably the central ceremonial occasion of Javanese culture. It is a commensal occasion—an offering of food for some important purpose shared by the participants. It is

essentially a rite although it appears to be a social occasion. It may be a life-cycle observation, the building of a new house, opening a new business, or the settling of a dispute. Invitations may be received in written form or by word of mouth. For Indonesians no reply is necessary because it is understood they will come if at all possible. For a foreigner it is polite to indicate whether you are coming since they might make special arrangements for you such as assigning someone to meet your car. The invited guests will gather for a brief period of socializing. The selamatan meal will be laid out, traditionally on the floor, with certain prescribed foods featuring the "nasi tumpeng" or large mound of rice. The host will call the guests to be seated around the displayed food. He will offer some words to explain the purpose of the selamatan. At his invitation the ranking guest will then break the rice cone and place a small amount of each kind of food on her/his plate. Other guests will follow and help distribute the food. The meal will be consumed rather quickly and without further ceremony, and then the selamatan is essentially over. It is a low-key but important occasion, and it is more important that it is held than exactly who comes. Invited guests who were not able to attend are sent a portion of the food, so that they in effect share in the ritual.

## Typical Indonesian Entertaining

Typical Indonesian entertaining shows its debt to the selamatan ceremony even though it may not have such a serious purpose. Typically, the buffet (the Dutch called it rijstaffel or rice-table) is laid out well before the guests arrive. Guests will arrive reasonably promptly and will socialize amiably ("ramah tamah") during which time they like to be free to circulate. They do not approach the buffet table until invited to do so, and if there is any reason for the gathering, it may be observed by a few words from the host before the meal begins. The ranking guest will definitely be the first to eat. The meal will be of short duration and the party will break up rather early. (Indonesians rise very early in the morning, usually before dawn, particularly if they observe the Muslim prayers, and like to be back home relatively early at night.) If there is a special guest of honor, there may be some entertainment after dinner. This may be a cultural presentation featuring some regional performances or home-style entertainment in which the guests will be called upon to perform. No matter how miserable you feel or how miserably you perform you should try to be a good sport and acquiesce with a song, a joke, or a funny story.

## Your Entertaining

Indonesians prefer receptions and buffet dinners to more formal entertainment. They do not really like to spend hours over a gourmet dinner. (Unfortunately they are caught in the fashionable business practice of expensive dinners in Jakarta restaurants, which do take hours. They will have to sort this out. No doubt they like the feeling of affluence, which an expense-account dinner implies.) However informal your party is, they will expect a written invitation. On the official level, a telephone invitation will not be dealt with until a card is received. Occasionally one receives a call from the office of Mr. So-and-so, who would like to accept your party of the 29th but has lost his invitation, and could you send another one? It would not suffice simply to confirm on the telephone. This is possibly because if the message is not accurately received it could result in embarrassment to the invitee if he arrived at the wrong time, place, etc. Even though you have sent a written invitation, however, the chances are very poor that you will

get an answer until the day of your party. There are many reasons why an Indonesian cannot tell you if he can accept your invitations.

It is presumptuous for him to say what he will be doing two weeks from Tuesday. Who knows what fate has in store before then?

He probably cannot come, but it is impolite to say no.

An obligation to his family, the network of his groups of mutual responsibility, or his superiors might arise at the last minute, which would take precedence over a social commitment to you, even if he had accepted.

His secretary did not tell him about the invitation. Secretaries are very protective and deferential to their bosses. They hesitate to bother them with invitations for some time in the future and wouldn't dream of pressing for an answer. Perhaps he is waiting for a better offer.

If the invitation is to a wife but is sent to the husband's office, it got lost, the secretary did not tell her and the husband forgot to. It is better to send these to the home.

One makes many plans for the future but one never knows what imperatives each day may bring. That is why it is impossible to say that one can fly to Bali one month hence, but there is no problem in deciding on one day's notice...just the opposite of our sense of planning.

It must be admitted that this reluctance to reply to invitations can be a bit disingenuous. You might receive an invitation by telephone to some official function and be phoned daily until you give a definite answer. Most Indonesians in Jakarta know that international etiquette calls for a definite answer and that you need to know who is confirming in order to plan your function, just as they do.

## Social Commitments

The foreigner may not realize at first how very many social commitments the Indonesian has. In addition to life-cycle ceremonies, which will be described later, each person is likely to belong to several organizations that have periodic get-togethers. Every holiday, every anniversary of an organization, or opening of a new program is observed with a public ceremony. One begins to realize that life is a constant act of affirmation of membership in a group, of repeating the rituals that confirm the public order. All the participants attend these observances rather faithfully with apparent great enjoyment and congeniality. The many groups one belongs to and the many occasions to come together provide vast networks of social contacts within Indonesian society. A Batak (ethnic group from Sumatra) man is an official in the Ministry of Health. He is also a doctor and professor of medicine. His wife works in a bank. They belong to a Batak group, a Ministry group, a doctor's group, a university group, and a neighborhood organization. In addition, she belongs to the Ministry Wives organization and a group from the bank. If it's a marriage of mixed religions or ethnic groups, there are that many more groups.

## Life-Cycle Ceremonies

Foreigners tend not to be invited to these except to the larger wedding receptions. If you indicate a genuine interest to your Indonesian friends and acquaintances, however, they will very likely invite you to the next ceremony in which they are involved. If they do, you may be sure you will be treated as a guest of honor with every courtesy and an elegant standard of hospitality. The form of these ceremonies differs according to the "adat" or traditional law of each ethnic group. Some of these are:

The Seventh-Month Selamatan: Given for a woman who is pregnant for the first time to ensure a safe delivery. You would not bring a gift to this, but would call and bring a gift after the birth.

Circumcision: In Islam boys are not circumcised until they are 11 or 12 years old, but this confirmation into Islam is the occasion for a major ceremony.

Weddings: At the very minimum there will be two ceremonies: the religious and the adat. It is interesting that the adat ceremony is still felt necessary and as important as the religious. The Javanese adat ceremony is called the "nikah," and it is usually held at home. Only the family, closest friends and highest dignitaries are invited. The families will be in traditional dress and guests should dress conservatively (suits and conservation day dress). The religious and adat ceremonies will be performed and a meal will be served. In modern practice there is usually a reception in the evening given by the bride's parents. These can be monstrous affairs where one waits in line up to 45 minutes to greet the bridal party and then head toward the buffet. You will receive a written invitation but no response is necessary. If you cannot attend, however, an explanatory note is polite.

Other Auspicious Occasions: The safe arrival at adulthood of one's children or a promotion. These might be appropriate occasions to sponsor a cultural event such as a "wayang kulit" or shadow puppet play. The Indonesian will be delighted to invite a foreign guest and honored that the guest is interested to come, but an invitation should be secured first. If you hear about such an event, you make it known through an intermediary that you'd be very much interested in attending.

Death: When there is a death the family is notified immediately and they notify others who are in turn obliged to spread the word. If you hear about a death of someone you know, you go immediately to the house to console the bereaved. Indonesians bring money, which is tucked into a tray of uncooked rice at the entrance, or they may bring rice or other food. You may order flowers that are delivered to the house. You offer your condolences to the family, view the body that is laid out in an inner room, and then retreat to sit quietly and wait for the prayers, which are said before the funeral procession. Since funerals are held within 24 hours after death, it is possible you would not hear about the death of a friend until after the funeral. It is customary to pay a call on the family as soon as possible thereafter. The family traditionally holds several selamatans or other ceremonies: for the Javanese a selamatan on the evening before the third, seventh, fortieth, hundredth days; and one year, two years and 1,000 days after the death. The 40th and 1,000$^{th}$-day selamatans are the most important and guests are welcome at these.

# OTHER PROTOCOL

## Seating

Seating arrangements at an Indonesian affair may appear to be very casual, but ranking guests will always be told where to sit. There may be no place cards at tables or there may be no tables at all but just chairs about the room, and except for the ranking guests the others will be invited to sit anywhere.

At an entertainment or ceremony there are usually no assigned or reserved seats. As Indonesians of senior rank appear they will be ushered courteously to the front row. They may very likely demur and offer to sit anywhere, but everyone understands they will eventually end up in the front row. If subsequently a more senior person arrives and the front row is full, those already occupying front seats will immediately vacate them and offer them to the senior ranking person. If more honored guests arrive, chairs are hastily added to the front. And so it goes, until everyone of rank and status has a good seat, no matter how crowded the front may become. Indonesians know exactly who outranks whom and will immediately fall back to an appropriate place if outranked. No one will ever take a front row seat unless invited to do so. The implications for an American entertaining are:

1. If you are inviting Indonesians and Americans to some entertainment, make sure you have devised some way to prevent the Americans from taking the best seats on a first-come basis, even if it is a benefit performance for which they have bought tickets.

2. At a seated dinner be sure to identify the ranking Indonesian and pay appropriate honor. He will be offended at your ignorance if you seat him lower than another Indonesian he outranks, and the Indonesian in his proper place will be acutely embarrassed. If your guest of honor or others clearly outrank the Indonesians present, of course everyone would be seated in the normal order. If your guest of honor does not outrank the ranking Indonesian guest, you may seat him in the place of honor if the disparity is not too great, since it is Indonesian custom to give the guest of honor the seat of honor. The point is to give the proper place to high-ranking Indonesians. If they are officials there is a clear order of precedence that may be obtained from Indonesian Protocol and that should be known in the Embassy front office. For non-officials it is a little obscure, but age and education weigh very heavily.

## Dress

Indonesian government officials wear a safari suit type of uniform, and this is a possible option for daytime wear for men, particularly while traveling. A man calling on a provincial governor or a senior official of the central government should wear a business suit, however. Wives of officials always wear "kain and kebaya" (blouse and batik sarong) for official functions, even while traveling by plane, boat, or jeep to the most remote spot and they know they will be met by a bevy of ladies all dressed up as well. For the American woman involved, therefore, a dress is

more appropriate than a pants suit. In the evening the usual dress for men is "batik," which means, when written on an invitation card for example, a long-sleeved batik shirt worn outside the trousers. These are very elegant and are considered an alternative to the lounge suit. (A suit is required, however, for wedding receptions.) Women's evening wear may be short or long, usually something fairly conservative and comfortable. Jakarta is not a high fashion post, and though there's nothing wrong with dressing well, one need not be obsessed with chic.

# RECREATION

## Theaters and Cinemas

The opportunity to see Western theatre and movies is limited in Jakarta. There are occasional visits by Western musicians and dance companies and local amateur groups, which stage three or four productions a year. The Jakarta International School has an excellent music and drama department, and their productions are usually better than the adult shows. Movies are readily available. There are several modern theaters, and the movies are probably only a few weeks behind the United States. Both the Commissary at the Embassy and the American Club have movies for rent, and there are also several video clubs from which to choose.

There is also ample opportunity, however, to see Indonesian theater and cultural performances. There is a performing arts center in Jakarta that does an excellent job of booking music and theater both traditional and modern. Other places such as museums and Taman Mini, the Indonesian in Miniature park, outside the city have regular cultural performances. Except for the most popular events it is not necessary to buy tickets in advance. In any case, seating is seldom reserved. The prices may differ by section, but one sits freely within the section.

## Wayang

At some point the American interested in Indonesian culture should see performances of the three types of Javanese play or "wayang." "Wayang kulit" is the shadow play with flat perforated and painted leather puppets. "Wayang golek" is a puppet play with stick puppets with carved and painted wooden heads and realistic clothing. "Wayang orang" is a dance opera performed by people. In each form, performances may be several hours long, and the story will probably be one of the countless segments from the Hindu epics. The *Mahabharata* (the struggles between two great clans) or the *Ramayana* (the story of Rama, and incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu) are the main stories performed. A performance of "wayang kulit" will be especially rewarding to the student of Javanese culture. Go with someone who speaks Javanese and who is a connoisseur of wayang so s/he can translate for you and explain the significance, but don't be surprised if s/he becomes so rapt in the performance the translation is abandoned.

Traditionally, the wayang kulit was performed in the home or in the Javanese court to commemorate some important event, perhaps originally to honor the ancestors. Now it may be held in a hotel. The screen was hung outside, and the puppeteer would sit behind the light facing the screen, with his puppets lined up on the trunk of a banana tree placed horizontally below the

screen. The gamelan (traditional percussion orchestra) players sat behind the puppeteer, facing the screen, and the audience behind them. Thus, the shadow side of the screen was visible to the people inside the house, while the public—the guests, the host of the house, and the neighbors—saw the performers. Opinions differ on whether the shadow side of the performer's side is better.

The performance is a tour de force of the puppeteer, or "dalang." He must sit before the screen and operate all the puppets. He does not leave his seat for the entire performance, which traditionally lasts 7 to 9 hours, and he does not look around or even acknowledge there is an audience. When it is over he withdraws unobtrusively among the few aficionados or dozers who are left.

The plot will involve some problem, crisis, quest, or conflict that must be resolved. Regardless of the particular story, there is a certain progression of obligatory scenes, which are entirely predictable. Some court scenes in which personages of high rank explicate the problem can be very lengthy and repetitive. They do not really capture the interest of the audience, but everybody understands they are essential. Comical scenes that involve commoners or clowns have the audience entirely committed, roaring with laughter, and shouting approval depending on the dalang's ability to make topical jokes or tease the orchestra players, the guests, or the host. The battle scenes are also closely followed for their excitement and a demonstration of the dalang's dexterity in manipulating the puppets. He must also have a good singing voice, as there are many musical interludes in which he signs popular Javanese songs.

During the performance the guests are free to chat, get up and move around, and view the show from one side or the other; and at some point if it is an all-night performance, a late night supper will be served. If one sees the performance until the pre-dawn hour, one begins to perceive that one has shared in a crisis of human affairs that has been brought to a safe solution through the skill of the dalang and the execution of the wayang. Indeed, like the selamatan, it is another ritual, and it matters less who comes and how they react to the performance than the fact that it happens. If you are not up to an all-night show, there are many opportunities to see two-hour adaptations.

An Indonesian audience will behave in a somewhat similar fashion at a western performance. There will be talking and moving about and people will simply get up and leave if they are tired or bored. The constant chatting will be disconcerting to the western performer but to the dalang the familiar buzz of the audience behind him is a comforting confirmation that others are sharing in his struggle with the elements that threaten the harmony of the universe.

## Restaurants

There are numerous restaurants in Jakarta offering a variety of international cuisines. The best among them offer a pretentious Western menu and tend to be very expensive, but there are a growing number of neighborhood restaurants that are attractive, convenient, and reasonably priced. Indonesian restaurants are quite good. Since Indonesians customarily eat at home, it is not so easy to find a restaurant in our sense with good Indonesian food. It is either toned down to suit what they perceive is the Western taste, or it is a casual roadside stand with questionable

standards of hygiene. Indonesians eating out will customarily get a snack or a single dish from a *warung* (a roadside stand) or a *tukang kaki lima* (a "five-legged peddler," i.e., a street vendor pushing a two-wheeled cart which has a vertical post on which to rest when he comes to a halt.) Americans are cautioned to avoid such stands as the food hygiene is unpredictable. The food at these stands has probably been standing out for several hours. The utensils are very casually washed. Tipping is not customary at small shops or restaurants, which have a service charge. Otherwise a tip of up to ten percent is appropriate though not mandatory.

## Other Public and Private Places

In Jakarta and its environs there are amusement parks, a zoo, botanical gardens, and a sports complex where a variety of games and exhibitions are held. Indonesians are particularly keen on badminton and soccer, and these matches will get national attention on live television. Other sports popular with Indonesians are tennis and golf. There are a dozen or so public golf courses around Jakarta and several public tennis courts, the largest number at the sports complex mentioned above. There are private sports clubs and sports facilities at hotels.

The public places are all very crowded on Sundays as this is the only full day off for Indonesian offices and schools, and the family outing is very much observed on Sunday. For Americans in the official community there is an inexpensive American club with a wide range of sports facilities, a restaurant, movies, and a snack bar.

Outside the city there is the possibility of boating in the Jakarta bay, snorkeling or scuba diving off one of the many island outside the bay, and a hotel consisting of a complex of bungalows on one of these islands. Good swimming beaches are a three-hour drive from town. There are mountains an hour and a half drive south of Jakarta where bungalows may be rented. The air is fresh and cool at elevations up to 5,000 feet, and there are trails for walking or climbing and cozy fires in fireplaces at night. The mountain area is also heavily populated and the roads to Jakarta busy with Sunday traffic.

## Hotels

Hotels in Jakarta are the same as in any international city. In most provincial towns there is at least one comfortable hotel with clean service and a private bathroom. It is wise to check, however, if you are traveling to remote places or small towns, whether such accommodation exists. You might find a simple hostelry or a guesthouse. It is prudent in such cases to carry your own soap, toilet paper, towel, and top sheet. The traditional Indonesian bathroom contains not a tub but a "mandi," a tiled box filled with unheated water. There will be a pan of metal or plastic on the rim of the mandi. The bather flings enough water on himself to enable a lather of soap, and this is followed by rinsing with repeated splashes of cold water. After the first shock the self-inflicted attacks with cold water are wonderfully refreshing; and why this is preferable to the agonies of a cold-water shower is unknown but undeniable. This is something, however, you certainly don’t have to worry about at the hotels most expats would frequent.

# TRAVELING IN THE COUNTRY

Jakarta is not representative of Indonesia, and the visitor should make every effort to see some other parts of the country. The American Women's Association organizes very enterprising expeditions to remote areas, and travel agencies are increasingly alert to making tours to interesting events around the country. Some general comments are: It is/can be expensive. The distances are great and the airfare is high. It is unfortunate that although Indonesia is an archipelago, there is no comfortable ship service between the islands. One of the only ways to get to some of the outer islands is by small sailing vessels known as Bugis schooners. One sleeps on the boat and tours the islands by day. Trains are adequate and provide insight to the society, but can be unreliable, overcrowded, and not always safe. Buses are very cheap but crowded, uncomfortable, and not as safe as trains. The foreigner will be conspicuous in out-of-the-way places but will usually be treated with courtesy and respect. It should be noted that in buying tickets, confirming arrangements or getting seats, the same rules apply as in motor traffic: You do not exist if you have not established eye contact, and the concept of the queue is unknown. Credit cards are accepted in only the major hotels in tourist areas; travelers checks are difficult to cash, and there is often a substantial fee to do so. Most places expect cash.

Toilet facilities are not easy to find when traveling, but one may try gas stations, bus stations, restaurants, or shops, where, if one asks, one will be allowed to use the toilet room of the proprietor. It may be a shock at first to discover only a tiled floor with foot rests over a drain and a nearby bucket of water and a pan. In fact, this is a very sanitary accommodation: only your feet touch anything that anyone else has touched. Bring your own toilet paper or kleenex.

When traveling with Indonesians it is imperative to share whatever you have. It is simply unthinkable to eat or smoke without offering some to those around you ("mari silahkan," please let's have some) even though it may be obvious there is not enough to share. In that case the person offered will smile and say "terima-kasih" (thank you, but in this case no thanks), and you are free to eat. It is not considered hypocritical to make this gesture; on the contrary, it is arrogant if you do not. It is a way of getting general permission to eat. In the fasting month most Muslims will not eat, drink, or smoke during daylight hours. It is not considerate to be seen eating in public at this time.

# DAILY LIFE

## Shopping

There are department stores, supermarkets, and hotel shops in Jakarta where prices are fixed. There are other shops in Jakarta and other tourist centers where prices are clearly marked on goods, but it is often possible to get a ten to fifteen percent discount by asking for it. Say that you are with the Embassy, or that you live in Indonesia and are not just a tourist, or say you would like a discount because you are buying several items. The proprietor will have to be present, to authorize a discount and some will not budge, but it is worth a try. All other shopping, whether for one kilo of tomatoes or for a priceless art object, is by bargaining. The concept of a low price

and volume sales has not yet arrived. The merchant will try to get the highest possible price, even if it is outrageous and you will never return there after you find that out. Further, bargaining is a social event. The merchant enjoys the exchange and is rather crestfallen if you don't want to play. You should offer a third to half of the asking price and end up at a point somewhere between your two positions. If you are examining several items, try to avoid undue attention to the one you really want. You probably will not fool him, but it is to your advantage if you do not obviously covet anything. If you don't reach a price, you can walk away and see if you are called back. Once you make an offer you should be prepared to buy. It is very poor form to renege if your offer is accepted. If you buy, you will pay cash. Charge accounts, personal checks, and credit cards are very little used, even in Jakarta. If you shop often with the same merchant or if you become familiar with the prices, bargaining can go much more quickly. As a foreigner, however, you will always be expected to pay a little more than the local person. You are not part of the merchant's society; s/he has no obligations to you; you are obviously affluent. If you bargain mercilessly, it will be considered very unbecoming. Affluent Indonesians are also expected to pay more, and they tend not to bargain very severely, since if they are prosperous, they are expected to pay a good price.

## Transportation

Public transportation in Jakarta is varied and is generally not recommended for Embassy employees and families. Most people have their own cars. The only taxis recommended are those of the Blue Bird and Silver Bird groups, which have reliable meters and English-speaking dispatchers. You may see Indonesians taking other forms of transport. These include the "becak", a three-wheeled pedicab, which requires advance bargaining to arrive at a price. Other options are a three-wheeled motorized vehicle with a cabin called a Bajaj, or the "opelet," a mini-bus with bench seats facing one another in the back. These opelets operate local routes all over the country and can be found scooting along remote village roads. They operate frequently, will stop anywhere along the route, and the fare is inexpensive. There is usually a fair amount of camaraderie among the passengers jammed together, and it is a good way to rub elbows very literally with the local people. City buses are very cheap and plentiful but very crowded and often difficult to board. Pickpockets are also a major problem. Taxis are the most convenient form of transport.

If you have your own car, you will have to decide whether to hire a driver. The wages are a significant expense, and it takes time to find a reliable driver unless you inherit one from your predecessor. The wages are reasonable—usually a little less than $100 a month as of this writing (2004)—and there are many advantages. For example, it is not easy to drive in Jakarta because of the rules of the road. The fabled courtesy of Indonesians does not extend to the roads. That is because you have not established any relationship with the people in other cars, so they behave as if you do not exist. The right of way goes to the one who crowds in first. Discipline is poor at traffic lights and chaotic at busy intersections and railroad crossings. In ordinary traffic other cars may wander into your lane, pass on corners, and speed dangerously. If you can sit in the back seat and ignore it all, it will preserve your tranquility. Drivers are good to have from a security standpoint—plus Jakarta is a complicated city, and it is helpful to have someone driving who knows the way and can ask directions. In addition, in case a pedestrian is hit a crowd

instantly gathers and can become very angry. It can be physically dangerous for the driver, perhaps even more so if the driver is a foreigner. It does not matter if the pedestrian was at fault.

### Telephone

One of Indonesia's high communications priorities was the Palapa satellite, which enables telephone communication between the major islands. It also enables excellent connections with the United States, and calls go through within minutes. Overseas operators speak English. Leaving messages can be a problem if you do not speak Indonesian. There is a phone book issued annually but it is not complete for private listings. Phone service is good with several options for calling long distance to the United States including a tie line.

### Barber and Beauty Shops

There are excellent shops in Jakarta's leading hotels and many neighborhood shops, which offer all services, including the traditional Indonesian massage or "pijit." Quality and hygiene are comparable to most international cities.

## SOCIAL ROLES

### The Family

The family is the most important unit in Indonesian society. The ideal role of man and woman is that of father and mother. This pattern extends through official relationships to the head of state. Certainly to the individual Indonesian, the family is what matters most. Marriage is almost universal, and the expectation is that children will soon follow. To behave otherwise is still to encounter subtle but persistent social pressure. As each person establishes a household he adds to the network of the extended family, which still operates in Indonesia. Distant relatives are among those with whom you get together during the Lebaran season. Every household probably includes some relative from a distant place residing temporarily or permanently with the family. Indonesians send their children to be brought up by their parents, or to live with their brothers or sisters who are posted someplace where educational advantages are better. Ask an Indonesian who has come back from a trip anywhere in the country, or even abroad, what hotel he stayed in and he is more likely to reply "with relatives." A distant relative can turn up on one's doorstep and must be entertained immediately. It would not do to say one has to go out to a reception given by foreigners.

It follows that if you establish a relationship with an Indonesian family as a family, it will be a more meaningful one than merely as business colleagues. As the occasion arises it is appropriate to bring your older children on Lebaran calls, to wedding receptions, on neighborhood calls. Inquire about their children and meet them if possible.

### The Woman

The ideal Indonesian woman is “ibu,” mother, and although her role extends far beyond motherhood, not even the wildest feminist would be so foolhardy as to advocate a life for women that did not give prominent role to the duties of wife and mother. The woman has been traditionally active in Southeast Asian societies. She is active in the agricultural cycle, she goes to market, she supplements the family income with her own market activities or crafts, she fights alongside the men in struggles against enemies (there are many heroines in anti-colonial battles) and in many traditional societies may be the leader. Ironically, some of the effects of modernization have been disadvantageous to women. Mechanized rice mills have eliminated a source of income for women who operated hand-powered (or actually foot-powered) traditional mills. Educational opportunities, given first to the boys, have tended to disadvantage women for some roles they had held such as village leader. Modern Indonesia is attempting to redress this by the inclusion in the cabinet of a Minister for Women's Affairs, whose priority it is to ensure that women planners are included in the earliest and every stage of social planning.

Tradition, however, has not prevented women from rising to the highest ranks of Indonesian society. The President is a woman as are several cabinet ministers. Although the top rungs of the corporate ladder remain traditionally male, women have begun to make their presence felt in the business and professional world as well as in politics.

## Children

Children are loved and wanted, pampered and seldom punished. Infants are not encouraged to experiment or explore but are literally carried about beyond the age when they might be toddling on their own. They are fed at will and not according to the convenience of the parent, but may be seen being spoon-fed while being carried around the house. As they grow older a conventional behavior is reinforced by constant reminders of what to say and how to be deferential to elders. Discipline is mostly by exhortation; punishment probably not more than a pinch or the threat of retribution by a bogeyman (this more likely from the servant than from the modern mother). There is much emphasis on conventional behavior and conformity to the expectations of family and superiors. This does not seem to succeed in repressing personality, it would seem, because the children can be terrors at home, and the growing evidence of teenage rebellion indicates that the old ways of child rearing may not be adequate to the kind of influences the child will receive from television, an affluent household, and keen competitors in a crowded school.

All of this is a bit difficult for the foreigner to observe. A child will appear very shy and speechless to strangers and may, if older, be bashful about trying English or unbelieving that you can speak Indonesian. There is no opportunity for mixing with Indonesian children at the Jakarta International School since they are required by law to attend national schools. If the foreigner happens to become friends with a family with children of similar age this is of course the best opportunity to try and get to know them. Otherwise, the emergence of children in adult circles begins as they finish high school and contemplate college. Competition for college is very keen in Indonesia, and entrance to the limited number of places in state universities is strictly controlled by examination. Many families who would actually prefer to send their children to college in-country are forced to look abroad. Those who do go to college at home are interested in graduate study abroad if they are preparing for a profession. These are good opportunities to

get to know young people and to help them or put them in touch with someone who knows something about American higher education. Indonesians are very favorably inclined toward American colleges.

Boys and girls mix freely these days in coeducational schools and generally choose their own partners for eventual marriage—contrary to the old custom of arranged marriages. Although it is unlikely the chosen partner will be outside the religion of the othe, it is quite possible that s/he will be outside the ethnic group. At the moment this results in wedding ceremonies of incredible complication, as all cultures represented are observed. Sometimes three or four adat ceremonies will be held on successive days if the parents, too, are from different areas. Indonesian schools are great melting pots, and this has enormous significance to the society of the future. The local loyalties and fierce clannishness so threatening in the days of early independence may be softened in the next generation or two with the emergence of a true "Indonesian," or mixed ethnic background. It would be difficult to see what the basic cultural formulas of such a person would be other than predominantly Javanese.

### Superiors

Superiors at work are like fathers and should take care of their employees like a father would his children. Among the attributes of a good father are wisdom and justice, and there is a keen concern among employees with fairness. This usually comes down to not showing favoritism among the staff, not to single out either for praise or criticism. They would rather get paid by seniority of service rather than performance. They should be dealt with in a courteous manner and never demeaned. In particular it is inexcusable to berate someone, particularly your inferior, so that he feels ashamed ("malu") and even more unforgivable if you do it in front of others. The result of such a confrontation with a servant will be such a shock to her or him that s/he will probably leave the household. In an office it would be the end of respect for the boss, and in a unionized work situation there would be some kind of employee action. The only way to enforce a standard of performance is by courteous exhortation, lots of explanation and conversation, humor, and an appeal to a person’s sense of cooperation.

## SENSITIVITIES

### The Chinese

A small (about three percent of the population) but important minority, the Chinese have long held a unique position in Indonesian culture. Trade and some migration have occurred at least since the beginning of the Christian era, and many influences have been thoroughly assimilated into Indonesian culture (the gamelan or percussion orchestra, traditional batik patterns of Java's north coast, the "barong" or dragon of Balinese folklore). Still the Chinese have remained ethnically distinct and suspect. Because of their privileged status as the merchants for the Dutch, they developed a relationship with the peasantry as intermediaries of the colonial power. Because of the Javanese disinclination, particularly among the elite, for dealing in commerce the Chinese developed a symbiotic relationship with the feudal rulers that continues to this day in their

relations with Jakarta’s elite. They protect the rulers' financial security, and they are protected. Even after seven or more generations living in Indonesia a Chinese person is still distinguished from a "pribumi," an indigenous person "from the earth." Chinese have been accused of exclusivity and have in recent years been adopting Indonesian names to indicate their commitment to its citizenship. At the same time the government has been actively pursuing ways to promote pribumi entrepreneurs. The foreigner should be sensitive to that fact that everyone knows who is and isn't Chinese, and the Chinese is not as yet accepted as a full Indonesian.

## Privacy

The concept of privacy as we know it has very little meaning in the Indonesian context. Javanese in particular do not care to be alone. To describe a party or a place as "ramai," crowded, carries connotations of lively conviviality and a congenial atmosphere. A good host would never leave a guest alone to go shopping or go for a walk, but would send someone to escort. If having a houseguest means having several of his entourage as well, room is always found for them. Americans usually have difficulty in adjusting to the lack of privacy. Having a house full of servants might sound like heaven, but the American has to accept their wandering in and hovering about unexpectedly. A maid will knock almost imperceptibly and proceed directly into the bedroom, escorting a man who has come to fix the air conditioner. The fact that there are times when you crave solitude would never cross their minds.

## Cleanliness

The concept of cleanliness carries the possibilities of cross-cultural negative feelings. Asians are well aware that Americans consider Asian villages crowded and dirty, and indeed they often are, but are we prepared to make the distinction between personal and public cleanliness? And are we aware that some Asians consider our habits of personal sanitation less than impressive? In the areas of Southeast Asia where water is abundant, the standards of personal cleanliness are extremely high. Most people bathe twice a day, on arising and before sundown, and fresh clothing is put on each time. The fact that overpopulation has caused pollution of the streams used for all purposes and encroached on the forests and unused land, which provided buffers for human hamlets, is something that has not yet been realistically acknowledged. In traditional society public cleanliness took care of itself.

## Work and Money

The concept of hard work as the antithesis to play is a Western concept. In traditional societies, particularly agricultural ones, the cycle of events is a continuous one. To plant and cultivate rice most certainly requires hard and faithful labor, but the fertility ceremonies and the harvest festivals are not play to relieve the boredom of work but are necessary rituals to help confirm and propel the cycle.

Similarly, the attitude toward money is susceptible to Western misunderstanding. We will ask "Is it generally thought best to save money for the future or spend it on the pleasures of the moment?" This is not the question. In the first place wage scales are sometimes so low that the

pressures of everyday living leave little option for savings. Most extraordinary expenses are financed by borrowing (as in our own culture). Secondly, the ceremonial expenses incurred by membership in various groups are as obligatory as daily expenses. By participating in them one ensures that one will be taken care of in turn in times of one's own need. One's social security is not in money but in one's relationship to the community.

### Foreigners

The attitude toward foreigners requires a sensitive understanding of a certain amount of ambivalence in Indonesian thought. There have been periods of xenophobia in Indonesia's process of nationalism. Developing the national identity has involved a certain amount of rejection of foreign influence. At the moment the country is embarked on a development program that encourages foreign investment and participation. But the signals are not entirely clear. For example, Indonesia encourages foreign investment, but the regulations are cumbersome and the obstacles often deter the potential investor. In principle, tourism is to be an important source of foreign exchange. But the authorities are not sure they really want an unlimited number of foreigners to stay for long periods of time. Visas are time consuming to obtain, are for finite periods, and are difficult to renew. There is an acute awareness that an adoption of western values will threaten traditional ones. For the present the foreigner is welcome so long as the extent of his influence is firmly controlled by the powers that be.

### Truthfulness

The attitude toward candor and truthfulness has been discussed. A greater value is placed on being agreeable than on being candid, and there is no particular virtue in telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth, especially if it requires conveying bad news. The Indonesian will avoid getting involved in an unpleasant or contentious situation. What does this mean to the foreigner? It means, for example, that if you make a proposal and your counterpart nods and smiles it does not mean that he agrees with you. It merely means that he has heard what you have said. How on earth, then, does one find out what his intentions are? There are small signals to watch for rather than the general agreeableness of his demeanor. He may fail to follow up on your train of thought, or may make some small suggestion or qualifying statement that steers the idea in another direction. When there really is agreement his cooperation will be readily observed.

## VALUES

Beneath the particular beliefs of the Javanese Muslim or Christian, the sophisticated thoughts of the intellectual, or the simple assumptions of the peasant, is the conviction that there is a universal order, a force of nature, to which man must attune himself. His best hope is for peace and harmony in the cosmos, and he should direct his efforts toward that end, either by appropriate behavior or at the very least by offerings (selamatans) of hope for peace and blessings and by avoiding any action that would disrupt the social and ultimately the cosmic order. The Western eighteenth-century notion of the Enlightenment—that man can use the scientific method and applied reason to discover everything there is to be known and thereby can

understand and control the universe—is regarded (if considered at all) as very naive and full of dangerous arrogance.

Man cannot control the universe, then. At best he can only know it, and know what is appropriate behavior. The ultimate way of knowing is feeling, or intuition. Reason has its place, of course. If you want to build a bridge or open a bank or explain gravity, you may use reason and the scientific method of proof. But some things are just not subject to reason. Sometimes things fly up instead of falling down. This may be because of some rational law that we haven't yet discovered, some other dimension in which ordinary laws don't apply (as Einstein discovered another dimension for the laws of physics) or it may never be explainable. It just is, and the best way of knowing it is to feel it. There need be no embarrassment if some things cannot be explained by reason. Most discussions and decisions are perfectly rational, but some things are extra-rational. (Most judgments about other people are intuitive—a direct perception of the other's behavior, demeanor, vibes.)

The person who has developed these feelings to the highest state is a person of refinement and self-control. He will not churn about in frenetic activity but will reserve his energies for training his intuitive inner feeling. His appearance and demeanor will be refined and restrained ("halus," or smooth). The antithesis of this type is one who is coarse ("kasar," or rough).

Though man cannot control the universe, he is not utterly powerless or irrelevant in the scheme of things. When men behave badly it contributes to chaos, and when men follow moral and spiritual behavior and follow religious injunctions, it contributes to peace and harmony.

Society should also be peaceful and harmonious and men should cooperate in right behavior. The group is more important than the individual; and harmony and mutual security are more important than individual rights. Mutual security depends on cooperation and reciprocity ("gotong royong"). (Indonesians who are asked to contribute to something are expected to oblige. Appeals to gotong royong are more effective than threats in getting cooperation, as was noted in reference to servants).

When there is a disagreement or a difference of opinion on policy, a decision should be made on the basis of consensus rather than contest. There should be mutual consultation of all interested parties ("musyawarah"), during which time a consensus ("mufakat") should develop. There is no voting, as that would draw attention to the position that was defeated, thus causing embarrassment and disharmony. (The only significant issue that has ever come to a vote in the Indonesian parliament was the new marriage law.)

The above is a synopsis of the value system that comprises the worldview of the Javanese and, by extension and some modification, most of the other cultures in the multi-ethnic society that is Indonesia. It is the basic rationale for what we observe in social and much political action.

The reliance on feeling rather than reason as the final appeal to meaning is the basis for the mysticism that is never far from the surface of Indonesian thought. Feeling, the direct experience of the powers of nature of the supernatural, is mysticism. The most sophisticated Indonesian will

have some mystical experience to tell about in a most matter of fact way. The intuitive experience of nature reveals that there are forces alive in inanimate objects—this is the legacy of the animism underlying all Indonesian cultures (and perhaps all others as well). Certain objects have magical powers, in particular the "kris" or ceremonial dagger made by very exacting rituals from meteorite metals. The head of state is required to have such power-laden objects ("pusakas") as confirmation of his legitimacy. In the present case one such object is the flag, raised on 17 August 1945 when Independence was declared. It is brought out in solemn ceremony each August 17.

## RELIGION

It is no anomaly to talk about mysticism and modern religion in successive paragraphs in the Indonesian context. The attraction of an organized religion is akin to the attraction of a leader, the attraction to a systematized and reliable intermediary between man and the universe. The fallibility and frailty of humans lead to a certain amount of piety in facing the supernatural. It is noteworthy that none of the religions that have been embraced in the archipelago have been propagated by force. Traders and/or missionaries spread Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. An organized religion was enthusiastically accepted. Today the belief in one God is the first of the five principles of state philosophy ("Pancasila"). Although the overwhelming majority of Indonesians are Muslim and Indonesia is the largest Muslim country, it is noteworthy that Indonesia is not an Islamic state. The constitution guarantees religious tolerance and the laws are not based on Islam but on Dutch jurisprudence or “adat” (traditional ethnic law). It is sometimes said that Indonesians (especially Javanese) are not really Muslims, but that is not doing justice to their beliefs. Several elements in Islam coincided with some indigenous beliefs: the emphasis on fasting and repeated prayers confirmed the ideal of the self-restrained person who fulfills the required rituals (fasting and meditation in fact are the techniques of pre-Islamic Javanese society to achieve spiritual superiority); the strictures against alcohol were appealing to a people who felt an instinctive aversion to loss of decorum or self-control. There are many communities in Indonesia that observe very conservative forms of Islam, but the more tolerant are nonetheless devout Muslims. Some of the more tolerant follow beliefs in addition to the orthodox ones, which they do not perceive as contradictory.

## NATIONALISM AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Since the emergence of nationalism, the struggle for independence, and the current series of programs of economic development, many Western political and social values have been added onto the traditional system. Nationalism, democracy, and social justice are three of the five pillars of *Pancasila*, the state philosophy, and this state philosophy is promulgated intensively by the government. Economic development is a national goal of the highest priority. (If Sukarno can be called the Father of his Country, President Suharto would no doubt be content to be called the Father of Development.) In its current phase economic development encompasses Western capital investment and high technology projects, as well as improvement in agricultural production.

Even in the traditional setting, in the most refined and Javanese of circumstances, the foreigner should not be so intimidated by the restrained forms of politeness that his behavior becomes unrecognizable. Indonesians expect Americans to behave like Americans. The main thing to remember as one meets persons for the first time is that it is better to err on the side of politeness than casualness. It is very important to convey (sincerely) the impression that one is truly interested in the country and its people and respectful of local customs. That will help establish a personal relationship, and that relationship is more important, here as in many other Asian societies, than the job title.

Once a relationship is established, some of the restrained forms will be dropped and an amazing (sometimes astonishing) candor will emerge. Persons one may have suspected not to have an opinion about anything will turn out to be extremely determined and single-minded. It takes a while to establish these relationships, but that is when one begins to learn about Indonesia.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


American Women's Association. *Introducing Indonesia*. Jakarta, 1979.

Andersen, Ben. *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese*. Cornell Modern Indonesia Project Monography, 1965.

*Apa Guide to Bali*. APA Publications, Singapore, 1976.

*Apa Guide to Java*. APA Publications, Singapore, 1976.

Covarrubias, Miguel. *Island of Bali*. Oxford University Press, 1972 (original edition Knopf 1937).

Dalton, Bill. *Indonesia Handbook*. Moon Publications, Michigan, 1977.

*Encyclopedia: Indonesia*. http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Indonesia, 2003.

Fowler, George, Roggie Cole and Joe C. Bartlett. *Java. A Garden Continuum*. Amerasian Ltd., 1974.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Religion of Java*. University of Chicago Press, 1960.

Holt, Claire. *Art in Indonesia. Continuities and Changes*. Cornell University Press, 1967.

Hughes, John. *Indonesian Upheaval*. David McKay, New York, 1967.

*Indonesia 2002. An Official Handbook*. Direktorat Pengelolaan Informasi Internasional, Jakarta, 2002.

Jones, Howard. *The Possible Dream*. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1970.

Kahin, George McT. *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*. Cornell University Press, 1952.

*Lonely Planet Travel Guide*: http://www.lonelyplanet.com, 2004.

Malik, Adam. *In the Service of the Republic*. Gunung Agung, Jakarta, 1980.

McDonald, Hamish. *Suharto's Indonesia*. Fontana/Collins, Blackburn, Victoria, 1980.

Mulder, Niels. *Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java*. Singapore University Press, 1978.

Sievers, Allen M. *The Mystical World of Indonesia*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Wilhelm, Donald. *Emerging Indonesia*. Cassell, London, 1980.